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ENGLISH ALMANACKS

DURING THE FIRST THIRD OF THE
NINETEENTH CENTURY.

A PAPER READ BEFORE THE MANCHESTER LITERARY CLUB,
JANUARY 15TH, 1900.

BY
ABEL HEYWOOD.



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ENGLISH ALMANACKS

DURING THE FIRST THIRD OF THE CENTURY

In considering the history of this important period, it is necessary that we should bear in mind two or three matters that are material to our subject, and which, though they do not strictly belong to the period, still so materially affect it, that we must of necessity dwell for a time upon them, in order that what follows may be intelligible.

It will, perhaps, be remembered that the publication of almanacks was a monopoly shared in by the Company of Stationers and the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge. This monopoly was granted in the time of Elizabeth to two members of the Stationers' Company,* and was extended to the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge by James I. For the last three years prior to 1775, a printer named Thomas Carnan, in defiance of the monopoly, published several almanacks on his own account, and in the course of the above-named year, was arraigned before the Court of Common Pleas for his offence.

"The Court, doubting the validity of the King's Charter, on which the right of the Universities and the Stationery Company was founded, directed a question upon its legality to be argued before the Court of Common Pleas, whose judges, after two arguments before them, certified that the patent was void in law; the Court of Exchequer thereupon dismissed the Bill, and the injunction was dissolved.

"Carnan, having obtained this judgment, prosecuted his trade for a time with increased activity, when a Bill was introduced

* Ency. Brit., edit. '76.

into the House of Commons by the Earl of Guilford, then Lord North, Prime Minister, and Chancellor of the University of Oxford, TO REVEST, BY ACT OF PARLIAMENT, THE MONOPOLY IN ALMANACKS WHICH HAD FALLEN TO THE GROUND BY THE ABOVE-MENTIONED JUDGMENTS IN THE KING'S COURTS."†

Mr. Erskine, afterwards Lord Erskine, appeared at the Bar of the House, as Counsel for Mr. Carnan, to oppose the Bill, and the speech he delivered on the occasion is in itself an important chapter in the history of almanacks, but it is too lengthy for us to do more than take a few extracts from.

After some general remarks on the relation between the Press and the Crown, Erskine proceeded :

"When, therefore, the Stationers' Company, claiming the exclusive right of printing almanacks under a charter of King James I., applied to the Court of Exchequer for an injunction against the petitioner at your bar, the question submitted by the Barons to the learned judges of the Common Pleas, namely, 'Whether the Crown could grant such exclusive right?' was neither more nor less than this question. Whether almanacks were such public ordinances, such matters of state, as belonged to the king by his prerogative, so as to enable him to communicate an exclusive right of printing them to a grantee of the Crown? . . . The question so submitted was twice solemnly argued in the Court of Common Pleas, when the judges unanimously certified that the Crown had no such power; and their determination, as evidently appears from the arguments of the Counsel, which the Chief Justice recognised with the strongest remarks of approbation, was plainly founded on this—that almanacks had no resemblance to those public acts, religious or civil, which on principle fall under the superintendence of the Crown. The Counsel who argued the case for the plaintiffs . . . felt that the judges had no other standard by which to determine whether it was a prerogative copy, than by settling, upon principles of good sense, *whether it ought to be one*; they laboured, therefore, to show the propriety of the revision of almanacks by public authority; they said they contained the regulation of time, which was matter of

† Erskine's Works.

public institution, having a reference to all laws and ordinances ; that they were part of the prayer book, which belonged to the king as head of the Church ; that they contained matters which were received as conclusive evidence in Courts of Justice, and therefore ought to be published by authority ; that the trial by almanack was a mode of decision not unknown ; that many inconveniences might arise to the public from mistakes in the matters they contained. Many other arguments of the like nature were relied on, which it is unnecessary for me to enumerate in this place, as they were rejected by the Court ; and likewise, because the only reason of my mentioning them at all is to show that the public expediency and propriety of subjecting almanacks to revision by authority, appeared to those eminent lawyers, and to the Court which approved of their arguments, as only the standard by which the king's prerogative over them was to be measured. . . . Thus, sir, the exclusive right of printing almanacks, which from the bigotry and slavery of former times had so long been monopolised as a prerogative copy, was at last thrown open to the subject, as not falling within the reason of those laws which still remain, and ever must remain, the undisputed property of the Crown. The only two questions, therefore, that arise on the Bill before you are, *First* : Whether it be wise or expedient for Parliament to revive a monopoly, so recently condemned by the Courts of Law as unjust, from not being a fit subject of a monopoly, and to give it to the very same parties who have so long enjoyed it by usurpation, and who had, besides, grossly abused it ? *Secondly* : Whether Parliament can consistently with the first principles of justice, overlook the injury which will be sustained by the petitioner, as AN INDIVIDUAL, from his being deprived of the exercise of the lawful trade by which he lives ; a trade which he began with the free spirit of an Englishman, in contempt of an illegal usurpation ; a trade supported and sanctioned by a decree of one of the highest judicatures known to the Constitution ?”

After an argument as to the power of the legislature and the Crown to create monopolies, he proceeds :

“And if the patent be void, Parliament cannot set it up again without a dangerous infringement of the general liberty of the press.” He continues : “Sir, when I reflect that this proposed monopoly is a monopoly in printing, and that it gives, or rather

continues it to the Company of Stationers—the very same body of men who were the literary constables to the Star Chamber to suppress all the science and information to which we owe our freedom—I confess I am at a loss to account for the reason or motive of the indulgence, but get the right who may, the principle is so dangerous, that I cannot yet consent to part with this view of the subject.”

Then, after arguing that Parliament is arraigning legal judgment, he proceeds to say that other matters are of much greater importance for Parliament to interfere with than almanacks.

“Are not,” he says, “misconstructions of the arguments and characters of the Members of this High Assembly more important in their consequences, than mistakes in the calendar of those wretched saints which still, to the wonder of all wise men, infest the liturgy of a reformed Protestant Church? Prophecies of famine, pestilence, national ruin and bankruptcy, are surely more dangerous to reign unchecked, than prognostications of rain or dust; yet they are the daily uncontrolled offspring of every private author, and I trust will ever continue to be so. . . .”

After reciting the preamble of the Bill he proceeds to give what the preamble would have been had it recited the truth.

“The Bill must have commenced thus: Whereas the Stationers’ Company and the two Universities, have for above a century last past, contrary to law, usurped the right of printing almanacks, in exclusion of the rest of His Majesty’s faithful people, and have from time to time harassed and vexed divers good subjects of our Lord the King for printing the same, till checked by a late decision of the Courts of Law. Be it therefore enacted that this usurpation be made legal, and be confirmed to them in future. This, sir, would have been curiosity indeed, and would have made some noise in the House, yet it is nothing but the plain and simple truth; the Bill could not pass, without making a sort of bolus of the preamble to swallow it in.”

Continuing that it cannot be for the sake of correctness and decency that the monopoly exists, he says, as proving the assertion :

“The Stationers’ Company . . . to increase the sale of almanacks among the vulgar, published, under the auspices of religion and learning, the most senseless absurdities. I should really have been glad to have cited some sentences from the 113th edition of *Poor Robin’s Almanack*, published under the revision of the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishop of London, but I am prevented from doing it by a just respect for the House. Indeed, I know no house — but a brothel — that could suffer the quotation.”

After giving a number of ridiculous errors in the Calendar, committed in the authorised almanacks, he contrasts Scotch and Irish publications :

“Whereas in Scotland, and in Ireland, where the trade in almanacks has been free and unrestrained, they have been eminent for exactness and useful information. The Act recognises the truth of this remark, and prohibits the importation of them.”

He then contrasts Carnan’s almanacks with the Company’s, and says :

“I challenge the framers of this Bill (even though he should happen to be at the head of His Majesty’s Government) to produce to the House a single instance of immorality, or of any mistake or uncertainty, or any one inconvenience arising to the public from this general trade which he had the merit of redeeming from a disgraceful and illegal monopoly.”

Erskine then passes to the interest the two Universities had in the monopoly, saying :

“And now, Mr. Speaker, I retire from your Bar, I wish I could say with confidence of having prevailed. If the wretched Company of Stationers had been my only opponents, my confidence had been perfect ; indeed, so perfect that I should not have wasted ten minutes of your time on the ruling, but should have left the Bill to dissolve in its own weakness ; but when I reflect that Oxford and Cambridge are suitors here, I own to you I am

alarmed, and I feel myself called upon to say something which I know your indulgence will forgive. The House is filled with their most illustrious sons, who no doubt feel an involuntary zeal for the interest of their parent Universities. Sir, it is an influence so natural, and so honourable, that I trust there is no indecency in my hinting the possibility of its operation. Yet I persuade myself that these learned bodies have effectually defeated their own interests, by the sentiments which their liberal sciences have disseminated amongst you; their wise and learned institutions have erected in your minds the august image of an enlightened statesman, which, trampling down all personal interests and affections looks steadily forward to the great ends of public and private justice, unawed by authority and unbiassed by favour."

"It is from thence my hopes for my clients revive. If the Universities have lost an advantage enjoyed contrary to law, and at the expense of sound policy and liberty, you will rejoice that the Courts below have pronounced that wise and liberal judgment against them, and will not set the evil example of reversing it here. But you need not, therefore, forget that the Universities have lost an advantage, and if it be a loss that can be felt by bodies so liberally endowed, it may be repaired to them by the bounty of the Crown, or by your own. It were much better that the people of England should pay ten thousand pounds a year to each of them, than suffer them to enjoy one farthing at the expense of the ruin of a free citizen, or the monopoly of a free trade."

A note appended to this in the 1810 edition of Erskine's *Speeches* adds:

"According to the seasonable hint at the conclusion of the speech which, perhaps, had some weight in the decisions of the House to reject the Bill, a parliamentary compensation was afterwards made to the Universities, and remains as a monument erected by a British Parliament to a free press."

The result of the appeal was that the Bill was not proceeded with, and as the Universities lost their annual pension, they received in its place a parliamentary grant. The printing of almanacks became nominally free, though, as we shall see, they were really far from being so, and Carnan himself only con-

tinued publication for a few years. For the reason of this, we have to go back a considerable time, to 1711, in Anne's reign. when the first tax of twopence, in the shape of an impressed stamp, was imposed upon every almanack printed. It seems to us, long after the event, to be somewhat singular that the imposition of this tax which was destined to keep almanacks in a miserable subjection to ignorance and cheatery for 120 years. the influence of which was indeed not to die in the 19th century. was received with no great resentment. Possibly the poetesses whose opinion of the duty I am about to quote, foresaw by the prophetic power which was common to all framers of almanacks, how the stamp would by and bye come to be looked upon, as we are assured it was even in this present century in the case of the arch quack Moore, as a hall mark guaranteeing excellence and trustworthiness. I suppose to this day the patent medicine stamp is regarded by the ignorant as a similar testimony and guarantee. I have not seen the act of Parliament imposing the tax, but we may presume from one of the verses I quote, that it was imposed under the promise that it should last for 32 years only.

In the *Ladies' Diary, or the Woman's Almanack*, for 1713. appear a number of answers to an enigma set in the almanack of the previous year, i.e., 1712. This is the first year of the stamp, the act having been passed in 1711. The subject of the enigma was the almanack stamp itself. The editor of the Diary says: "The *Prize Enigma* was wrote when the act of Parliament was passed for *Laying a Duty upon Almanacks*, ordering a *Stamp* to be impress'd on the Title Page of every one of them: and several Months before they were printed, or the *Stamps prepared*, and which again I here think it convenient to repeat."

'Tis ten to one within this hour,
That you have seen me o'er and o'er;
And yet, before this present year,
I ne'er to mortal did appear,
In so rich Garbs as now I wear, etc., etc.

Several rhyming answers are printed, from which I take the following selections as indicating the indifference of the public of the time to the rise in price the stamp would cause. The book is advertised as 2s. in sheep, or 2s. 6d. in calf, but there is no advertisement of price before the imposition of the duty.

In the dead time of Night, when Sleep I did lack,
 In thinking and pausing on your Almanack;
 I straightway arose and lighted my Lamp,
 And reading your riddle, I found it a STAMP,
 Which by a late Act was enjoin'd to appear,
 Upon every Diary you put out this year.
 Thus richly adorn'd, 'tis in value the more,
 Yet fewer Friends therefore, it has than before;
 But why should we think the Book *Threepence too dear*,
 When again at the *old rate* you'll have it so near
 For the tax it is laid *but* for *Thirty-two Year*.

Within the Hour before I read
 Your Prize-Enig. last published,
 The Bookseller shew'd me the fair
 And new-born *Stamp* your Diaries wear;
 And made me pay for *It Threepence*,
 (Tho' stamp'd for *Two*), on a pretence,
 They scarcer were, and that this Year,
 Not half the number printed were:
 Well may your Diaries lose their *Dames*,
 Made doubly dearer by these *Shams*, etc.

It is evident that the booksellers were putting a profit on the twopenny duty.

The history of the growth of the tax is this, as made out from the impressed stamp on the almanacks themselves, though this account does not tally with the published lists I have seen. 1712 are the first stamped with a twopenny stamp, another twopence followed in George II.'s reign, appearing on the almanacks for 1758, and fourpence more followed on those for 1798. These three lie in layers around the crown, etc., one beyond the other. In 1804 the tax became one shilling,

with a new stamp without the layers, and finally in 1816 it culminated in one shilling and threepence, which sum had to be paid until 1835 on every almanack, sheet or book, published in England.

During a great part of the same period the tax on *perpetual* almanacks was ten shillings.

At the beginning of the century then, we find practically all the English almanacks to be published by the Company of Stationers, and each to be paying a duty of one shilling, and the duty realising something over £30,000 per annum. A Parliamentary return of the yield of the almanack stamp during 20 years, viz., 1810 to 1830, was published, and from this I find that in 1810 it yielded £32,929 9s. 1d.; and in 1830 £31,908, 15s. 10d. The Companion to the British Almanack for 1833 gives the total annual issue of almanacks, taken from a Parliamentary paper, from 1821 to 1830, as from 481,690 to 528,254, the highest number being that of the earliest year. In 1898, the publishers of one penny book almanacks informed me that they had printed 1,054,248 copies, and the book was then (the November preceding) out of print!

In former papers read to this Club, I reviewed with a tolerable amount of fulness, the contents of English-printed almanacks, from the earliest to the close of the reign of William III., and in the interval of rather more than a century from that time to the one I am now considering, several matters of very great importance occur, but will have to be barely mentioned here. Partridge's glory shone refulgent until quenched by Swift's witty attack. Swift insisted that Partridge was dead, but the latter said he wasn't, and his almanack, though it ceased for a year or two, came out again, written though, I believe, by another prophet, with the motto "*Etiam mortuus loquitur.*" Partridge's almanack lasted far into the present century, dying a lingering death in my time. The other great prophet was Moore, "Francis Moore, Physician," who came into a printed existence in 1680, and who still lives, though in the

refined, not to say etherealised and angelic form one would expect to find him after a life of 220 years. A year or two ago he ceased to be published by the Company of Stationers, and his glory may now be said to have departed, for he no longer pries into the future.

One more matter of great importance happened within the period we are skipping, viz., the Correction of the Calendar, in 1752, when the dates from the 3rd to the 13th September were skipped, and the civil year was made to commence on January 1st, instead of March 21st. These important and most interesting matters must be left.

This in brief, then, is the condition of affairs when the century opens. Partridge and Moore are alive and prophesying, and the Company of Stationers is still virtually in possession of the almanack monopoly. In an article in the *Athenæum*, in 1828, the continuance of the monopoly is thus described, and the Company is thus spoken of :

“The Worshipful Company then proceeded upon their twilight career in another mode (that is, after the failure of their attempt to re-establish the legal monopoly). They *bought up* the almanacks which individuals from time to time endeavoured to establish, and they either suppressed them altogether, or, having adopted them into their list, *insinuated their own poison* into the really useful matter they contained, so as to degrade them to the level of their oldest and most successful, because their worst publications. They did this in the case of ‘Moore’s Almanack Improved,’ which was originally published by a large wholesale consumer of almanacks, of the name of Wills. That book *now* contains astrological predictions of the same stupid and impudent character as its prototype, ‘Francis Moore, Physician.’ It is thus that the monopoly has been as effectually preserved as if it had been legally sanctioned. Indeed, it is difficult to establish any rival work, from the large expenditure of capital required in the outlay of ready money for the stamp duty.”

The London Magazine, 1828, speaking of the Company of Stationers, says :

“Francis Moore, physician, began his career of importance in 1698 [this is not correct], and by the condensation within himself of all the evil qualities of his contemporaries, he gradually contrived to extinguish the lives, and then with true vampire spirit, to prey upon the carcases, even up to the present year, of Lilly, Gadbury, Lord, Andrews, Woodhouse, Dade, Pond, Bucknall, Pearse, Couston, Perkins, and Parker, the illustrious and the obscure cheats of the seventeenth century. A hundred and thirty years is a pretty long career of imposture. Poor Robin, the hoary jester of the fraternity, has just given up the ghost, after a life of iniquity longer than that of old Parr, or Henry Jenkins. Heaven avert the omens from Francis Moore.”

But if almanacks in England were in this disgraceful condition of ignorance and superstition, the nation was astir, though the governing powers had openly declared that an informed people was a public danger, and that the “taxes on knowledge” existed to prevent the spread of intelligence. The people were arraying themselves against ignorance and oppression. The Reform Bill of 1832 came at last, and before long the crusade against the newspaper tax rose; some of the men, like Carlile, Hetherington, Watson, Cleave, and I may add my father, being actuated by the highest motives in the action they took. Some of these men, as we shall see, combated the ridiculous almanack tax, which was repealed at last in 1834, coming into operation in 1835.

In 1828, the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, published for the first time the *British Almanack and Companion*. Writing of this event, the *Gentleman's Magazine* said:

“Mr. Charles Knight joined forces with Mr. M. D. Hill. Lord Brougham, Sir J. Lubbock, the late Lord Wrottesley, and Admiral Beaufort, and, aided by some wranglers of Cambridge, produced in a month the first volume of the *British Almanack* which has appeared yearly since that date, revised, not by indolent and ignorant prelates, but by able and sensible mathematicians, and telling us the tides and eclipses, leaves the rest of the future in the hands of Providence. Thanks to Mr. C. Knight, the prestige of ‘Old Moore’ is gone, though he is neither dead nor buried. From that day forward, however, the

day of the old almanacks was gone ; their sun was set ; ' useful knowledge ' beat ' useless ignorance ' out of the field."

How curiously the affairs of the world turn round ! By the year 1870 this very British Almanack which was to banish all the rubbish of the Company of Stationers, came to be published by that very Corporation which had become, we may presume, a purified and tolerably enlightened body. In its original form the almanack lived till 1897, when it, for the first time, was published by one of the Letts family, as a popular bulky shilling annual, on the lines of Whittaker, which had been in existence since 1868 or 1869.

Speaking of the coming of the British Almanack, the article in the *London Magazine*, 1828, from which I have already quoted, says :

" On a sudden a new almanack started up, under the superintendence and authority of a Society, distinguished for its great and successful labours to improve the intellectual condition of the people. For the first time in the memory of man, an almanack at once rational and popular was produced. From that hour the empire of astrology was at an end. The public press, infinitely to their honour, took up the cause. The blasphemy of Francis Moore, and the obscenity of Poor Robin, were denounced and ridiculed through all quarters of the kingdom. In one little year, the obscene book was discontinued, the blasphemous book retreated into pure stupidity, and the publishers of the blasphemy and the obscenity applied themselves, in imitation of the first powerful rival they had ever encountered, to make a rational and useful almanack. By the year 1832 (even we prophesy) the whole delusion will have vanished before the day-spring of knowledge, and the people will then wonder, that for so many years they endured the insults habitually offered to their morals and their understandings."

There are two errors in this extract which it is proper we should correct. It was not the first time in the memory of man that a sober almanack was published. Even the despised Company published several, and an important series was published at Aberdeen, a considerable number of which the learned

librarian of the Aberdeen Public Library has allowed me to have for examination. In this series, beginning (so far as I have seen) in 1779, there is not a word of the idle nonsense that distinguished English almanacks. In addition to the calendar, in which the moon's age, moon's rising and setting, high water at Aberdeen, etc., are given; there is a list of Fairs, another of Fiars—which few will know the meaning of—the great Roads, House of Peers, Commons, Army List, Church, Scots List of Peers, Earls, Barons, etc. Every line in the book is such as is proper in an annual publication to-day.

A similar almanack I have seen up to 1835, and we may, I think, presume that the series has been continuous.

The Aberdeen Almanack is mentioned by Burns in one of his letters, when he says: "For my own affairs, I am in a fair way of becoming as eminent as Thomas a Kempis, or John Bunyan, and you may expect henceforth to see my birthday inserted among the wonderful events in Poor Robin and Aberdeen almanacks, along with Black Monday, and the Battle of Bothwell Bridge."

Scott, too, in *Redgauntlet*, has: "Old Turnpenny will answer no questions on such a subject, without you give him the passport, which at present you must do by asking him the age of the moon; if he answers, 'Not light enough to land a cargo,' you are to answer, 'Then plague on Aberdeen almanacks.'"

It should be mentioned here that Aberdeen almanacks date back so far as 1623. In Edmond's "*Aberdeen Printers*" will be found an analysis of the contents of a long series of these annual publications from the above date to 1735.

The other error that the author of the *London Magazine's* article makes, is where he ventures to prophesy. By 1832, he promised us, the almanacks prophets should be extinct, a prediction as wide of the mark as any thing Francis Moore ever wrote. There are still lots of fools left (I think Carlyle said that one was born every minute), and Zadkiel, Raphael, and Orion are, to this very year, rampant as ever, selling their

rubbish annually by hundreds of thousands. Indeed, after the repeal of the almanack duty in 1834, it is said in one of the Financial Reform Tracts (No. 34), published by the Financial Reform Association, and written, so the author told me, by Alexander Somerville, well known fifty years ago as "The whistler at the plough," that Moore's Almanack itself for 1835, the first year of free printing, doubled the sale of previous years.

May I here interpose a word about another tax which vanished just before the almanack tax, and which is spoken of in the same pamphlet by Mr. Somerville. It is the duty on pamphlets, which most of us have forgotten, if we ever knew of. "It was enacted by 55 George III., c. 185, that every book containing one whole sheet, and not exceeding eight sheets in octavo, or any lesser size, or not exceeding twelve sheets in quarto, or twenty sheets in folio, should be deemed a pamphlet. The same Act imposed a duty of three shillings upon each sheet of one copy of all pamphlets published. This duty, which was at once vexatious and unproductive, was repealed in 1833."

Of Moore's Almanack, Charles Knight wrote in his "Working Life," 1812:

"The believers in Moore's Almanack—and they comprise nearly all the rural population, and very many of the dwellers in towns—would turn this year with deep anxiety to the wondrous hieroglyphic which was to exhibit the destiny of nations. When 'Master Moore,' as the good folks called him, uttered his mystic sentences under the awful heading of 'Vox Cœlorum. Vox Dei, the voice of the Heavens is the voice of God,' how small sounded the mundane reasonings of the newspaper writers. If the great astrologer prophesied disaster, few would be the believers in success. There was scarcely a house in southern England in which this two shillings' worth of imposture was not to be found. There was scarcely a farmer who would cut his grass if the almanack predicted rain. No cattle-doctor would give a drink to a cow, unless he consulted the table in the almanack showing what sign the moon is in, and what part of the body it governs."

It was not all nonsense that Moore wrote, however, as instance this in 1821: "If Parliament men would make short speeches, they would get through more business, and do it better, too. I hope those Peers and Commoners who read my almanack will take this hint kindly, and set a good example in this respect."

A table of the rising, southing and setting of "the Pleiades, or Seven Stars for every fifth day in the year; of excellent use to find the hour of the night," lingers even so late as 1821.

In 1835, under the head of Vulgar Errors, is one I do not remember to have seen before, namely, "That when a man designs to marry a woman that is in debt, if he take her from the priest clothed only in her shift, he will not be liable to her engagements."

It is curious to meet with an anecdote which would lead us to believe that there were even people of position who believed—at any rate to some extent—in the clap-trap of the almanacks. In "Platt's Gleanings" it is said, "A man high in office in the city of London exclaimed confidentially to a friend of the Gleaner, 'By God, sir, there will be no war! Moore's Almanack predicts a year of prosperity, and *at this time* speaks only of peace; and I would sooner believe in Moore than in Bonaparte, or Mr. Addington.'"

It is stated in Chambers's Book of Days that Moore's Almanack, in 1753, sold to the extent of 75,000, and that the author received *five guineas* for the "copy" from the liberal Stationers' Company. Who was the author, however? From the following obituary notices which are to be found in old Manchester papers, he would seem to have been more than a single individual.

"A few days since died, at Nottingham, aged 62, Mr. John Pearson, who for several years has written the following Almanacks for the Company of Stationers, viz., POOR OLD ROBIN, MOORE, WING, SEASON, and PARTRIDGE'S."—Harrop's Mercury, December 13th. 1791.

"On the 23rd ult., in the 82nd year of his age, Mr. Thomas Wright, of Eaton, near Melton Mowbray, who for more than

half a century compiled a Moore's Almanack."—Harrop's Mercury, December 19th, 1797.

This last is, perhaps, not Francis Moore's Almanack.

It is not necessary that I should quote further from Moore's books to show the character of his work. The opinions I have copied do that sufficiently, and it is less necessary that the choicest verses of Poor Robin should be brought before you. Mr. Erskine has given them a character which in the main I am prepared to accept, but it must, of course, always be remembered that as well as tom-foolery and filth, there was sober information, and the ordinary calendar.

These two almanacks, Moore and Poor Robin, were the most largely circulated during our century, up to the time of the repeal of the stamp; other almanacks were published by the Company, but I could only give an imperfect list, and it would serve no purpose to give the titles of the few nineteenth-century taxed almanacks I have.

Of more interest are those published without the stamp, which we must term contraband. As I have mentioned, some of the men who were concerned in publishing newspapers in defiance of the fourpenny tax, took up the case of the almanacks, and both Richard Carlile and James Watson issued, the one a sheet, and the other a book and also a sheet.

Carlile's Almanack was printed on calico, and I have one of them in my possession. He contended that it was a printed calico, and that there was no duty on such material. It only appeared for two years, and it would seem that the Excise had considerable doubt as to whether Carlile's contention was not sound, for they compromised with him, as the following letter explains:

"RICHARD CARLILE to ABEL HEYWOOD, December 30th, 1831.

"In complying with your request to send you six Almanacks. I wish to be understood as not responsible, and not encouraging you to sell them. I suppose you have a few particular friends to whom you wish to give a copy, as a suppressed curiosity. We now sell them stamped, at the additional cost of the stamp. I

rely on your honour not to compromise me. I have informed the Commissioners of Stamps that we have sent out ten thousand copies, and that a great number may remain unsold : but that I have cautioned all my agents, which I hereby do with you.

"The Commissioners of Stamps will not enforce any penalties for the past. The truth is, though not intended to be so, the law is strictly on the side of the Cotton Unstamped Almanack.

"Respectfully,

"R. CARLILE."

Carlile's Almanack was not particularly cheap, as the following advertisement from the "Poor Man's Guardian," December 17th, 1831, will show :

"The Untaxed Cotton Almanack published at the General Publishing Mart, 1, Bouverie Street, Fleet Street. This very cheap and very useful publication is running through a very extensive sale, and is affording a specimen of the advantages to the people generally, of cheap useful knowledge. It merits general encouragement, as it is a most useful ingredient in the Warfare on the Taxes on Knowledge. It may be had on coloured glazed cotton at one shilling ; on plain cotton at sevenpence ; and may be ordered of Booksellers, Newsmen, and Linen-drappers.

I have another letter from Carlile to my father, which, though not touching on the subject of almanacks is, I think, interesting enough to be introduced here, as a brief autobiography of one who was a very important personage in the early history of the campaign against the "Taxes on Knowledge."

"RICHARD CARLILE to ABEL HEYWOOD, February 16th, 1835.

"Unless I go out of life prematurely, my career must end in a triumph. I have been working on steadily on one consistent course, through good and through evil report, in the advocacy of such political principles, not as were the most profitable for the moment, but such as I thought the best ; and such, as is matter of notoriety, every other publisher and public man in the island, aye, all over the earth, shrunk from, before me, because of their portending danger or ruin to means of livelihood. From the year 1809 to the year 1824, a copy of Paine's Works could

not be purchased on the continent of America, and it was altogether my example here that restored them there; and the first reprinted edition there, was in part at my expense. It is a fair question for consideration as to what would have been the state of politics at this moment but for that conduct of mine. In Wilkes, Junius, Horne Tooke, and the corresponding Societies of the last century, we had men of political spirit far superior to what Hunt, Cobbett, and Political Societies of late have been. The country in spirit in 1794 was much nearer a Republic than it has been in this century, which I attribute entirely to the bastard kind of politics that has been advocated short of those of Thomas Paine. You may not remember, but the state and spirit of the Press in 1817, was despicable in comparison with what it now is; and even Cobbett's *Twopenny Register* of that time would be, by himself, deemed trash now. Who but myself, I should like to know, opened the way for his return from America in 1819, after his flight in 1817? It was his hearing of the successful publication of Paine's Works that did it, and that has made or led to all the political change to this moment. It was an example of extreme daring, under which all the other political writers have sheltered, and saved themselves from perpetual prosecutions. And what but that broke the spirit of Castlereagh? He had set his mind on putting down Paine's Works. He had a long correspondence with the late Lord Tenterden on the subject, in 1819, Tenterden—then Abbott—advising him not to prosecute then. He saw me in prison after having been stripped of everything. He saw my wife in prison, my sister, half-a-dozen shopmen; the Constitutional Association and Vice Society fairly beaten by my perseverance. He saw Peel make a second seizure, house and all, and my name up again in another shop in Fleet Street. He had set his mind on beating me; for he declared his determination to the Lord Chief Justice of the Court of King's Bench, in 1819, that at all hazards, my career must be stopped. He tried to bribe me, through the Archdeacon of Dorset, in 1822, at midsummer, just after the second seizure was made, but found it would not do; and there is not another apparent reason or circumstance why he cut his throat; for he was successful in every other case he attempted, that of the Queen excepted, which was not his, but the King's private purpose, and rather the business of Lord Liverpool."

Another calico almanack was printed, for one year only, by Mr. B. D. Cousins, who, during part of my time, carried on the business of printer at Helmet Court, Strand. I have not seen a copy of this almanack, and there is probably not one in existence, but Mr. Cousins told me, in 1876, that he called it "A political pocket handkerchief, a duster for the Whigs." It was, as he described it, about 26 by 16 inches. The first number had the almanack on one side and news on the other, subsequent numbers, of which there were about twenty, contained news only. Cousins's contention was, like Carlile's, that the sheet was a printed calico, but for the first number he was summoned to Bow Street, and was discharged "with a caution," on the ground that, being a young man, he did not understand the enormity of the crime he was committing. He told me that the prosecuting counsel, or solicitor, holding up a copy of the "Duster," directed the attention of the Court to the fact that the nation was being robbed to the extent of one shilling and sevenpence, one shilling and threepence for the almanack and fourpence for the news. The magistrate, taking a copy in his hand, said he would like to have it, but Cousins told him that was not possible unless it were stamped, and he took it over to Somerset House and had the stamps impressed, as an almanack on one side, and a newspaper on the other. Then he presented his bill, "To almanack, 2d.; to stamping, 1s. 7d.; total, 1s. 9d.;" and was duly paid. The calico news sheet cannot have been a success, as Cousins gave it up; but unlike most of those engaged in the crusade, he escaped either fine or imprisonment.

Cousins printed also, he told me, "Franklin Moore's Almanack," which professed to be printed in America. He also printed, for the proprietor, "Zadkiel's Almanack," for a good many years.

James Watson also published an almanack in book form for two or three years, 1832 the last: this also professed to be printed in America. It was a well-printed book, and was sold

for eightpence. *The Times*, believing it to be American, was unwise enough to speak of it as "An almanack stitched up as a pamphlet, beautifully printed on fine paper, and besides the calendar, containing several pages of useful information." This opinion of the press was made abundant use of by Watson in his advertisements.

The following "par" from the "Poor Man's Guardian," No. 76, November 17th, 1832, signed H. H., which initials we may read as Henry Hetherington, refers to Watson's Almanack :

"AN UNTAXED ALMANACK.—A friend of mine has kindly sent me a Book Almanack. I have attentively examined its contents, and though it is not ornamented with a stamp, I have no hesitation in declaring it to be the most useful thing of the kind I have ever seen. The price, too (eightpence), will, with its other merits, obtain for it an extensive circulation."

How many people suffered for selling this almanack I do not know ; many escaped, my father for one, for he told me he sold it. All were not similarly fortunate, as the following account from the "Working Man's Friend," No. 1, December 22nd, 1832 (published by J. Watson, 33, Windmill Street, Finsbury), will show :

"Bow STREET.—A young man named William Cooke was, on the 8th instant, charged before Sir F. Roe and Mr. Minshull, with exposing for sale an unstamped Almanack, called "The Working Man's Almanack," printed and published in Liberty Street, New York.

"Mr. John Thomas, a clerk in the stamp office, proved, that on the 28th of November last, he went to the shop of the defendant, situate in Dorrington Street, Leather Lane, and asked the price of "The Working Man's Almanack," the defendant told him they were 8d. each, and witness desired to be served with a dozen, for which he paid 8s., receiving 13 of the almanacks for that sum."

"The defendant complained of his not having had time to prepare his defence, or apply to his friends for assistance, as he did not receive the summons until Wednesday evening ; he wished, therefore, that the case should be postponed. Sir F. Roe observed that the charge against him was so plain that he could not

conceive what defence he could make of it. Did he mean to deny the fact of his having sold the almanacks to the witness? The defendant said that he did not deny that, but he still wished for time to make his defence."

"Mr. Hugh Tilsey, of the stamp office, said that there was another information against the defendant, for a similar offence. The magistrates convicted the defendant in the full penalty, £10 and costs, and in default of payment, he was committed for two months to the House of Correction."

The following comment was made by the editor of "Working Man's Friend":

"Who is he that objects to our saying 'there is one law for the rich and another for the poor?' The case of the lady-like thieves, the Miss Turtons, is in everybody's mouth; they are allowed by the thief-takers to escape to France, whilst poor Cooke is torn from his wife, young children, and aged mother, for what? Let 'The Times' answer: for selling 'an almanack stitched up as a pamphlet, beautifully printed on fine paper, and besides the calendar, containing several pages of useful information.'"

In the "Poor Man's Guardian," No. 123, October 12th, 1833, is this advertisement:

"THE AMERICAN ALMANACKS!

"BROTHER JONATHAN AGAIN.

"Just imported (duty free) from Mr. Doyle, of New York, a splendid SHEET ALMANACK, price six cents, or threepence British; containing a vast quantity of the most useful information, compiled on a new plan, and superior in paper and print to the best taxed ones published in England for the benefit of corruption and monopoly.

"Also may be had a BOOK ALMANACK, price twelve cents, or sixpence British; containing the most correct and valuable tables, a Chronology of Events, and the usual matter so convenient to individuals and families.

"Printed and published by John Doyle, No. 12, Liberty Street, New York, and sold in England by vendors of unstamped publications in town and country."

These are, of course, Watson's Almanacks, of which I have seen one copy, described in the catalogue of a public library as an American publication.

My father was very intimate with Watson, and he and his wife occasionally visited at our house. Mr. W. J. Linton wrote in 1879, in America, a brief but very kindly and appreciative memoir of Watson, which my father and I reprinted and published here in 1880. I remember Watson very well as a gentle, mild-spoken man, fond of and good to children, and always welcomed by them. Mrs. Watson, who survived her husband a good many years, I knew more intimately, and about 20 or 25 years ago, I wrote asking her to let me know what she could remember about the almanacks, and I also saw her upon the same subject about 16 years ago. One of her admirable letters I quote here :

“MRS. WATSON TO ABEL HEYWOOD.

“I do not remember how many were prosecuted, but I know there were a great many. The person who printed our books, Mr. W. Johnson, was the printer of the almanacks, and I have heard Mr. J. and my dear husband laugh over the fun years after, as the authorities never found out the printer. The almanacks sold so well, that the sale of those published at Stationer's Hall was much reduced, and then the Whig Government repealed the stamp duty in 1834. I used to take to my dear one (then in prison in Clerkenwell), a copy of all the pretty new almanacks that were at once issued, and we used to rejoice together over THAT victory when I went to him with his dinner (I never missed but two days all the six months). The changes since those days are very wonderful to look back upon. The sale of “The People's Almanack” was greatly helped by private persons; gentlemen would call and purchase a quantity and dispose of them among their private friends; my dear one used to send me a quantity when I was living at Stockton-on-Tees, in 1832-34, and I disposed of them amongst friends. Some of the sheets were 3d., and some books 6d., both were very well printed, and we were pleased to cheat the Government.

“When I was a child living in Leeds, I remember the old people who went about with tapes, thread, etc.. used to ask mysteriously

“Do you want a ‘Paddy’s Watch?’” (that was what served for an almanack in those days among poor people). It was printed on a sheet of very thin paper, adorned with cuts in the Catnach style; the price was twopence, or what they could get. I have seen the old woman produce it from under her cloak, and wondered what the mystery was all about. It is a pity we did not keep copies of the unstamped almanacks and our pamphlets, etc.; one never thinks of those things till too late.

“P.S.—I cannot find that the ‘People’s Almanack’ was published before 1832, so it would be about three years that they were on sale.”

In this letter we have the first mention of “Paddy’s Watches,” and Mrs. Watson exactly describes their character and appearance. They were printed in many places, Manchester among them, where a man named Jimmy Wheeler issued them. Jimmy used to say that he had been imprisoned forty times for selling them. His name appears more than once in a list of offenders to which I shall allude presently, and the “Manchester Courier,” October 25th, 1828, records that Jimmy was convicted at the New Bailey for selling unstamped almanacks, and fined £10 and costs. My father told me that on one occasion Jimmy was visited by the police in Miller Street, where he lived, and when the officers were walking off with the almanack formes, he took a “run punce” at the type, knocking it into hopeless “pie,” which the police probably would not care to carry away. Jimmy was the owner, too, of the first advertisement van for parading the streets. I quite well remember seeing one of these vans myself when I was a child. I have two copies of Jimmy’s ‘Paddy’s Watches.’”

In the return of the number of persons committed by the magistrates, already alluded to, those convicted in the metropolis for selling almanacks are not distinguished from those selling other unstamped publications, but of those convicted in the country, the following are for almanacks:—Appleby, two women 14 days each, “Belfast Almanacks;” Exeter, one man three days; Knutsford, 13 persons, one of these, James Wheeler.

for two months, the rest for terms of seven days to three months; Monmouth, one man for one month; Spilsby, two men for one and three months; Stafford, nineteen persons, fourteen days to three months; Warwick, fifteen persons for from fourteen days to three months; Edinburgh, two men, twenty days and ten days, one of these named Love, who had the longer sentence, was liberated by special order of the stamp office after two days.

The maximum time of imprisonment (16 George II., c. 26) was three months, upon conviction before one justice on the oath of one witness, the person apprehending an offender to receive twenty shillings reward.

On the subject of contraband almanacks Mr. Alexander Somerville (the Whistler at the Plough) wrote to me from Toronto, May 17th, 1877:

"A Belfast man tells me that Sims and MacIntyre, of Belfast, published almanacks, but I remember the Belfast Almanacks of a time thirty years earlier than this informant speaks of. Hawkers came to rural fairs and markets in Scotland, calling in a musical cadence of voice, 'Belfast Almanacks;' 'Belfast Almanacks for the new year;' 'Belfast Almanacks only a penny apiece.'

"In rivalry with the Flying Stationers from Belfast, were those from Aberdeen, with voices singing in the same musical cadence, 'Aberdeen Almanacks, Aberdeen Almanacks for the new year; Aberdeen Almanacks only a bawbee.'

"These almanacks had no stamp. They were purchased by everybody. The changes of the moon, rising and setting of the sun, lists of fairs, moral maxims, and weather prophesies filled their pages.

"There were also Aberdeen and Belfast Almanacks sold in shops, and at stalls in the market, bearing a red stamp, and at a higher price."

Mr. William Chambers, afterwards Sir William, wrote September 26th, 1876, and after regretting that he could give no information as to unstamped almanacks, said:

"I can, however, remember that the removal of the stamp was greatly promoted by the vast number of penny almanacks that were clandestinely printed and sold chiefly by hawkers in the streets, in defiance of the law. Aberdeen and Belfast were the places where these coarse-looking almanacks were produced for sale in Scotland and the north of England."

I have not been able to meet with copies of these cheap Aberdeen Almanacks, but by the kindness of Mr. A. Gibson, of Belfast, I have had a considerable number of those of Belfast in my hands. These date back as far as 1786, and continue until 1831. It is rather curious that in the earlier of them, the sun's rising and setting are evidently copied from a table constructed for a place a good deal north of Belfast. Pretty nearly all the Fairs, too, are Scotch, and I have no doubt that the whole thing is copied from an Aberdeen book, if it were not actually printed there. The book was very commonly printed, and occasionally the calendar tables are lifted from one year to another without alteration. Among other things, there are generally a few anecdotes of the Poor Robin stamp. There were a few prophecies such as this (1793), June: "The aspects of this month are various, some good and others bad, and will display their effects in many places;" but prophecies even of this general and safe character are only used as fill-ups.

Benn's History of Belfast, 1877, says on the subject of Belfast Almanacks:

"Of the old Almanacks of Belfast, a few words must be said. The advertisement of the oldest one which is known, and that but imperfectly, is expressed 'THE BELFAST AND POOR ROBIN'S ALMANACK for 1753, Calculated for the New Style. H. and R. JOY.' Almanacks were regularly published from this date, it is probable, but no complete or uninterrupted series can be found in the possession of any collector. Odd numbers of the last century are not uncommon, but are WITHOUT LOCAL INFORMATION. That for 1772 is described as 'much improved and enlarged, and the most complete Almanack ever published.' The Belfast Almanack was always esteemed, and so high was its repute, that in towns of the west of Scotland, travelling chapmen might have

been heard calling it out for sale as soon as it could be procured from the town in which it was printed."

I think it evident that "Belfast" and "Aberdeen" are words that were to a large extent interchangeable on the title pages of the cheap almanacks.

After the almanack was freed from the stamp it of course sold in enormously increased numbers. Even the then existing ones like Moore, sprang forward when the brake was removed, as has already been related.

Blackie's Popular Encyclopedia says: "In the report of the Commissioners of Excise Inquiry on the subject, it is stated that 200 new almanacks were started immediately on the repeal of the stamp, and that some of them sold upwards of 250,000 copies, although the old ones maintained their ground." I do not know when and where this inquiry was held.

The most largely circulated of the present books is Old Moore's Penny Almanack. Mr. Nathaniel Cooke, partner with Mr. Ingram (Ingram and Cooke), writing to me August 17th, 1876, said that the almanack was first published in 1842, a crown 8vo., of 16 pages. "In a year or two it was increased to 32 pages and is now 36. The rate has been for the last ten or dozen years 600,000 to 700,000," but in November, 1897, at which time the 1898 almanack was "out of print," the proprietors informed me, as I have already mentioned, that they had sold 1,054,248 copies. I have copies of this almanack from 1845 to 1862. Mr. J. M. Darton, once a publisher of children's books, of the late firm J. M. Darton and Co., told me that the almanack was done by Ingram at his (Darton's) suggestion, to advertise Parr's Life Pills, of which medicine Ingram was then proprietor. The paper was ordered from Crompton, then one of the largest makers in the kingdom, and he was so alarmed at the great quantity of paper required, that he sent a man to London to make special inquiry into the cause. Out of the profits of the almanack and the pills came the "Illustrated London News." The almanack is still published in the interest of Parr's Life Pills.

It is not easily possible to trace the history of almanacks after the repeal of the stamp, nor would the story be nearly so interesting as that of the stamped period. After 1838 it is all plain sailing, and there is not much interest in that ; you want storms and shipwrecks to make a voyage interesting. The most singular and even important item in the story since the above date is that prophetic clap-trap has not disappeared : far from it. Francis Moore's Almanack, as has been already related, has only quite recently broken its staff and drowned its book : Raphael, Zadkiel, and Orion sell in increased and even increasing numbers, and Moore's Penny Almanack, selling more than all the others together, has its hieroglyphic and its monthly prophecies. This is a very disheartening circumstance in 1900, as it must have been to Charles Knight, who had to write in the following disappointed strain in an article which appeared in the *British Almanack and Companion* for 1867. It is in a review of Zadkiel's Almanack for the same year.

" Having been somewhat enthusiastic in my conviction that education would gradually purify the moral and intellectual atmosphere. I was scarcely prepared during the past thirty-six years, to witness the continued existence of an almanack more outrageously stupid than anything Partridge or Moore ever produced. . . The authors boast that seventy-five thousand copies are annually sold. I have no doubt of it. The power of imposture has increased, is increasing, and ought to be diminished."

Then he continues, and his words are no doubt true enough to-day :

" The people of England are essentially as ignorant now as they were in the palmy days of Francis Moore. Undoubtedly a larger number can read and write ; but this is not education."

Zadkiel, in his preface to the almanack for 1900, says that it has been published for 70 years, edited for the first 45 by Commander R. J. Morrison, and for the subsequent 25 years by " the writer " of the present year's book. His circulation may probably be about 150,000, but it is not stated.

Raphael's Almanack for 1900 is the eightieth, and the editor states that the circulation for the last five years has been from 158,000 to 162,000. In turning over its pages I find that it is announced that we have commenced the 20th century, and among lucky and unlucky days I find that this present day, January 15th, is "a very unfortunate day for every purpose."

Finally then, we find in the last year of the 19th century, that the number of publications issued as almanacks for sale is much smaller than it was twenty years ago. The pictorial almanacks have disappeared, the Illustrated London, Cassell's Pictorial, and Bow Bells, which were profusely illustrated and sold largely, have ceased to exist. Hosts of cheaper books have also gone or are on their last legs. The prophetic almanacks hold far away the best position in the field among those remaining. The chief reason for the falling off in the number of legitimate books arises, of course, from the fact that numberless papers and periodicals make the almanack part of their contents, and that millions of almanacks are given away as advertisements. The only reason why astrological almanacks should sell in larger and larger numbers must be that as the population increases the number of noodles increases too.

It does not come within the scope of this paper to attempt to analyse or review any of these publications; rather let me conclude by reading one of Punch's then annual reviews of Zadkiel, which appeared in December, 1866. It is written in Zadkiel's own manner, and I would much rather quote it than copy from the arch-humbler himself.

"Mr. Punch has before him Zadkiel's own horoscope for 1867, and a sad one it is. In January the persecution of the unlucky creature will begin, for Jupiter is in the second house, and the aspect of Sirius is lurid. About the middle of the month, Zadkiel will nearly be choked by the tail of a shrimp, but will cough it up. Without giving the astral configurations by which his fate is made clear to the youngest student of the sublime science, we briefly state the rest. In February, he will be terribly cut in shaving. In March, a maid-servant will, out of spite, manage

to spill a kettle of boiling water over his left leg, and he will be confined to his house until April, when he will slide over a piece of orange-peel, and severely damage his southern configuration. In May, he will have many things stolen from his house, and his chimney will catch fire. In June, he will fall down-stairs. In July, he will be knocked down by a carriage. In August, he will buy some toad-stools instead of mushrooms, and be awfully ill for several days. In September he will sit down upon a live cat, and be severely bitten, but cauterisation may prevent evil results. In October, the stars seem to indicate a treacherous calm, but it will end early in November, when he will fall over the coal-skuttle, break his shins, and knock his head against a pewter beer-pot. And in December his medical attendant will make a revelation to him which we earnestly counsel him to take into his serious consideration."



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